

Newbridge Information Centre

WILDLIFE REPORT

Introduction

You are standing in one of the most wildlife-rich areas of Dartmoor. Nestled within a large area of ancient woodland adjacent to the River Dart, there is open moorland and ancient farmland nearby and a variety of habitats, plants and animals within a short distance from here. There is even a Dartmoor valley bog right behind the Information Centre!



New Bridge and the River Dart

If you are interested in wildlife it is well worth exploring the area. You can walk alongside the river in both directions on the Poundsgate side of the bridge. Downstream you will eventually reach a clearing at Deeper Marsh which is lovely for picnics. You can gaze into the deep pools of the river and watch Salmon and Trout lazily swimming just below the surface. Look out for the Dipper bobbing on rocks in the river too.

Upstream you walk through woodland and eventually out into scrubby moorland through a Devon Wildlife Trust reserve, which runs all the way to Dartmeet. The route above the river on Dr Blackall's Drive (part of the Two Moors Way) is an easier option above the potato field.

The River Dart passes from the high moor down to the sea and here it flows through a spectacular wooded valley for many miles. The surrounding woodland is mainly Sessile Oak and is rich in mosses and lichens, which cloak the trunks and branches of the trees. The woodland floor is carpeted in Bluebells, Primroses, Wild Daffodils and Wild Garlic in the spring and early summer (use Dartmoor Pocket Guide – Woodland Plants to help with identification). Wood Ant nests can be seen throughout the woods.

What you can see on site

Just behind the Information Centre is a stream and a bog and here you can see the plants typical of Dartmoor bogs including Bog Pimpernel, Marsh St John's Wort, Bog Pondweed, Water Pennywort and Round-leaved Sundew, a tiny red insectivorous plant (use laminated Dartmoor Pocket Guide – Bog Plants to help with identification). The rare Cornish Moneywort can also be seen here. Also in this area you can see the spectacular Royal Fern (not in the winter), which can grow to nearly 2m in height, and were widely collected by the Victorians for their gardens and became rare in the wild.

The river is fast-flowing and important populations of Atlantic Salmon and Sea Trout travel up river to spawn. Living much of their life out at sea they return to the river of their birth to spawn. Both species need clean, fast-flowing water to survive. Another species, the Otter, which feeds on fish, also lives here. These elusive creatures, once rare but now thriving, have a stronghold in the south west following huge declines due to DDT poisoning in the 1950s which contaminated the fish they ate.

Birds using the river include Grey Heron, Mallard, Cormorant, Goosander and even the exotic-looking Mandarin Duck. Dippers, a chocolate-brown, thrush-sized bird with a white bib are fairly common on this type of river on Dartmoor. They have a characteristic bobbing action when they perch on rocks in the river. They forage for small creatures that live in the river by walking upstream underwater! The Grey Wagtail is often seen and is actually more yellow than grey.

Other birds, mainly woodland species such as Chaffinch, Robin and Tits come to the bird feeder next to the Information Centre (use laminated Dartmoor Pocket Guide – Woodland Birds to help with identification) and the same species can be seen in the nearby woodland.

What you can see in the local area

Deeper Marsh

If you walk downstream you pass through woodland where the trees are cloaked in lichens. Along the river bank the Royal Fern can be seen again together with Alders, Greater Woodrush, mosses and liverworts, the latter being strange primitive lobed plants. Eventually you come out onto a large clearing called Deeper Marsh. The scrubby trees are mainly Alder Buckthorn, which is the food plant of the Brimstone butterfly, an early-flying yellow butterfly which may have been the original 'butter' fly. Wood Warblers, Wrens, Robins and Blue Tits also use the scrub for nesting and feeding. The deep pools provide good resting places for migrating Salmon and Trout. Where the rocks break the surface, and the water flows faster, look for Dippers.

Dart Valley (Devon Wildlife Trust) Reserve

Upstream there is a path through woodland where the majestic Oak trees are cloaked in mosses and lichens and the stone walls, made from river-bed rounded stones, are also covered in a green cloak of moss. Here typical woodland birds can be seen and heard such as Blue Tit, Great Tit, Robin, Willow Warblers and Blackbird (use laminated Dartmoor Pocket Guide – Woodland Birds to help with identification). Plants on the woodland floor are typical of ancient woodlands and include Wild Daffodils, Primroses, Bluebells, Wood Sorrel, Honeysuckle and Celandine (use laminated Dartmoor Pocket Guide – Woodland Plants to help with identification). Within the woodland is a large pond where you can see dragonflies in the summer months. Hannaford Pond, as it is known, was restored in recent years under the Dart Biodiversity Project.

If you walk further on you eventually come out onto an open area which supports scrub and moorland plants such as Bracken and European Gorse. Overhead you may see a Buzzard or hear its plaintive call. Although Buzzards are a relatively common sight in the south west, with a stronghold in Devon, they are much rarer in the rest of the country. They are very large brown birds that can be seen soaring high above you looking for rabbits, voles and carrion to eat. Their numbers have increased greatly over the last two decades following the recovery of rabbit numbers after declines due to myxomatosis in the 1950s.

This reserve is one of the Wildlife Trust's largest. More details of the species found there are given below.

Notable Habitats

Woodland, river, rocks, bog, scrub, stone walls.

Notable Species

Otter, Salmon, Dipper, Sundew.

Local walks

- Deeper Marsh – downstream on the Poundsgate side of the river.
- Spitchwick Common & Dart Valley DWT Reserve – upstream on the Poundsgate side of the river.

- The Two Moors Way runs through Newbridge. This long distance walk connects Dartmoor and Exmoor, from Ivybridge to Lynmouth, with a total length of 102 miles.
- The Dartmoor Way also runs through Newbridge. A circular route that sweeps around the National Park for over 90 miles linking hamlets, villages and towns. There is a walking and a cycling route.

Neighbouring wildlife sites

Dart Valley (Devon Wildlife Trust) – downstream from Dartmeet and upstream from New Bridge, this 290 hectare site combines upland moorland and unspoilt steep wooded valley with the fast flowing River Dart, internationally important for its salmon populations. Rare species living here include Nightjars, Blue Ground Beetle and the largest population in the UK of the High Brown Fritillary butterfly. The reserve, which is on common land, is part of the Spitchwick Manor Estate and falls within the Holne Woodlands SSSI. You can access the site from both Dartmeet (SX673732) and Newbridge (SX712708). Parts of the walk are rough and strenuous.

Wildlife sites within 5 km

Hembury Woods SSSI, owned by the National Trust is a good example of western oak woodland with a wet alder wood in the valley and areas of heathy grassland around Hembury Castle, a prehistoric hill fort. The wood is also one of 200 sites participating in the National Dormouse Monitoring Project. The River Dart runs through the wood and the whole of the Dart Valley is a biodiversity hot-spot. Most of the woodland is Pendunculate Oak with Silver Birch, Holly and Hazel in the understorey. Flowers include Bluebells, Primroses, Ramsons (Wild Garlic), Wild Daffodil and Wood Anemone, many of which are indicators of ancient woodland. Royal Ferns can be seen in patches, mainly on the river banks. A diverse flora of lichens occurs on the trunks and branches of the trees. The heathy areas have Gorse and Bell Heather, Tormentil, Carline Thistle and Wild Thyme. The variety of habitats support a rich invertebrate fauna. Access around the site is good and car parking is provided by the National Trust at SX729680.

Holne Woodlands SSSI – (No public access) - The ancient woodlands of Holne extend along the banks of the River Dart and cover over 1000 hectares. Such an extensive area of ancient woodland is extremely species diverse because of its size and undisturbed nature. Dominated by Sessile Oak the woods are also home to the rare Small-leaved Lime and a variety of native trees typical of the south west such as Holly and Hazel. The ground flora is varied and here are found species typical of ancient woodlands (ancient woodland indicators) such as Bluebell, Ramsons (Wild Garlic), Sanicle, Pignut and Primrose. The woods support nationally important lichen communities which thrive on the moist clean air here on Dartmoor. Many species of breeding bird live here including summer visitors such as Pied Flycatcher, Redstart and Wood Warbler. The woodlands are also a haven for several species of bat including the rare Horseshoe bats.

Buckfastleigh Caves SSSI are a complex of caves of great geological interest formed in the Pleistocene era. They contain the richest collection of fossil remains of various mammals in Britain, including hippopotamus, straight-tusked elephant, wild boar, spotted hyena, lion and small mammals.

The caves are now home to the largest colony of the rare Greater Horseshoe Bat in Britain, containing more than 1,000 adult bats which is about a quarter of the UK's total population. Emergence from the caves can be observed at dusk in the summer months from the Church Steps, Buckfastleigh. The rare crustacean *Niphargellus glenniei*, thought to be a pre-glacial relict also lives in the waters of the caves.

South Dartmoor SSSI – this upland site contains some of the most extensive areas of blanket bog, valley mire and acid grassland/heathland in southern England. At an altitude of up to 500 m and a very high annual rainfall this area also provides the headwaters for several major rivers in southern Devon. The area is largely treeless and heavily grazed by livestock. Blanket bog occurs on the highest ground and here you will find Sphagnum mosses, Common Cottongrass, Hare's-tail Cottongrass, Purple Moor-grass, Cross-leaved Heath and Heather (see Dartmoor Pocket Guide – Moorland Plants). Many areas are dominated by Bilberry (locally known as 'Whortleberry' or 'Hurts') or a mixture of Heather and Bilberry, grassland areas support Purple Moor-grass, Mat-grass, Sheep's Fescue and Bristle Bent. Breeding birds include Red Grouse, Dunlin, Snipe, Whinchat and Wheatear, all of which are uncommon in Southern England (see 'Dartmoor – a special place for moorland birds' leaflet in this folder). The Two Moors Way passes right through this site.

Species Lists for Newbridge area

Why not take a copy of this list out with you and use the tick boxes to record the species you find? Why not add to the list if you see something new?

Plants	Plants	Trees
Greater Woodrush	Bog Bean	English Oak
Wood Sorrel	Bog Pondweed	Sessile Oak
Celandine	Water Lily	Alder
Pignut	Canadian Pondweed	Hazel
Ivy	Water Mint	Sycamore
Self Heal	Marsh Lousewort	Holly
Common Dog Violet	Soft Rush	Silver Birch
Wild Strawberry	Round-leaved Sundew	Beech
Red Campion	Pale Butterwort	Hawthorn
Golden Saxifrage	Marsh St Johns Wort	Alder Buckthorn
Pink Purslane	Bog Pimpernel	Willow
Bluebell	Water Pennywort	Blackthorn
English Stonecrop	Cornish Moneywort	Elder
Honeysuckle		
Angelica		
Wood Anemone		
Primrose		
Wall Pennywort		
European Gorse		
Foxglove		
Greater Stitchwort		Ferns
Bramble		Polypody
Lords and Ladies		Bracken
Herb Bennet		Hard Fern
Tormentil		Royal
Bilberry		Lemon-scented
Sheep's Sorrel		
Ling (Heather)		
Western Gorse		
Ramsoms		
Creeping Buttercup		Other Plants
Wild Daffodil		Sphagnum moss
Alkanet		
Lesser Spearwort		
Bell Heather		
Cross-leaved Heath		
Milkwort		
Heath Bedstraw		

Birds	Birds	Mammals
Dipper		Otter
Blue Tit		Mole
Robin		Bats
Wren		Bank Vole
Mallard		Mink
Wood Warbler (S)		Dormouse ?
Grey Wagtail		Common Shrew
Buzzard		Pygmy Shrew
Song Thrush		Rabbit
Mandarin Duck		Fox
Blackbird		Badger
Chiff Chaff (S)		Wood Mouse
Chaffinch		
Great Tit		Amphibians and Reptiles
Yellowhammer		
Pied Flycatcher (S)		Adder
Great Spotted Woodpecker		Slow worm
		Grass Snake
Raven		Common Lizard
Cormorant		Palmate Newt
Goosander		
Kingfisher		Insects
Peid Wagtail		<u>Butterflies</u>
Marsh Tit		Holly Blue
Carrion Crow		Brimstone
Jay		Pearl Bordered
Redwing (W)		Small Pearl Bordered
Fieldfare (W)		Silver Washed
Blackcap (S)		Fritillary
Heron		Dar Green Fritillary
Dunnock		High Brown Fritillary
Green Woodpecker		
Mistle Thrush		
Coal tit		
Long-tailed tit		Wood Ant
Goldcrest		Pond Skater
		Keeled Skimmer
		Beautiful demoiselle
		Blue Ground Beetle
(W) = winter		
(S) = summer		